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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.'S MIDDLE-EAST POLICY, U.S.'S DEFENSE POLICY

11. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage March 5 on former President Chen Shui-bian's appearance in the pre-trial hearing in his money laundering and corruption cases; on the Cabinet's measures to boost the local economy; and the opening of China's National People's Congress (NPC) on Thursday. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a column in the pro-unification "United Daily News" commented on the United States' recent "aggressive diplomacy" in the Middle East. The column said Clinton's trip to the Middle East was not well timed, because the political scenarios in Israel and Palestine were not stable yet. The column said another future development in the Middle East worth watching closely is Clinton's decision to send two United States envoys to visit Syria. An op-ed in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" expressed concern that the potential decline of the United States Navy's power in the Asia-Pacific region might start a conventional arms race and the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the region. End Summary.

12. U.S.'s Middle-East Policy

"The United States' Aggressive Diplomacy towards the Middle East"

Professor Liu Pi-jung of Soochow University's Department of Political Science wrote in his column in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] (3/5):

"... Strictly speaking, [United States Secretary of State] Hillary [Clinton]'s visit to the Middle East at this moment was not at the right time. It is because Israel is establishing a new government. [Israeli Prime Minister-designate] Benjamin Netanyahu's cabinet lineup in the end will still be very likely central-right. Such a cabinet is not necessarily willing to compromise with Palestine. In terms of [the situation in] Palestine, Israel's launching of a war in Gaza at the end of last year failed to destroy Hamas. Instead, [the war] boosted support [for Hamas] as well as increased [Hamas'] bargaining chips during its negotiations with Fatah on the issue of 'a unity government.' The negotiations are still ongoing. Before the political situations in Israel and Palestine stabilize, it is impossible to have any progress in the Middle East peace process.

...

"There will be several points worth watching regarding [Secretary of State Clinton's announcement to send two] envoys to visit Syria. First, among the two envoys, one is a White House official [Daniel Shapiro], and the other is a State Department official [Jeffrey Feltman]. It showed that Obama and Clinton are coordinating [with each other] in this aspect. Second, Syria plays a decisive role in the Middle East, whether in geography, history, or politics. Furthermore, [Syria] is an indispensable player in pushing the Middle East peace process. In the past, the United States and Syria's hostility toward each other prompted Syria to ally with Iran. Now, the United States' friendly outreach to Syria will certainly change the situation in the Middle East. However, the difficulty lies in the third point. It is impossible for Syria to give up its guiding role [sic] in Lebanon. (Former United States

President George W. Bush recalled the United States ambassador to Syria in 2005 was because Syria was allegedly involved with former Lebanon Prime Minister Rafic Hariri's assassination). It is also impossible for Syria to adopt the U.S. style of democracy. How both [the United States and Syria] accommodate each other regarding this point remains to be seen."

13. U.S.'s Defense Policy

"US Strength Crucial to Asia Peace"

James Holmes, an associate professor of strategy at the Naval War College, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (3/5):

"... Today's Navy packs more punch than the Reagan Navy on a ship-for-ship basis. Still, numbers matter - especially in Asia, a predominantly maritime theater. Former US president George W. Bush's administration reconfigured the global US force posture, concentrating assets at Asia-Pacific strongholds like Guam. Too severe a drawdown of the US Navy nonetheless might leave US allies and friends in the region wondering whether Washington will - or can - honor its guarantees of their security.

"Consider Japan's plight. Japanese leaders might interpret US naval decline, coinciding with China's rise, as portending a collapse of the US-Japan Security Treaty. Finding itself on what Chinese strategist Sun Tzu called 'death ground,' Tokyo might see no recourse other than to abrogate its self-imposed cap on defense spending (at 1 percent of GDP), freeing up resources to augment the Maritime and Air Self-Defense Forces.

"A conventional arms race could ensue as China, Japan and even South POLICY

Korea look to their own defenses, hedging against one another's military endeavors. Worse, the unthinkable - a nuclear-armed Japan - could become thinkable under such nightmare circumstances. There's no denying the potency of Japanese antinuclear sentiment. But even Japan's 'peace constitution,' which codifies these attitudes, is not a suicide pact. Should the US nuclear umbrella become unreliable - or be viewed as such - Tokyo would see the nation's survival as at risk. This could warrant measures like developing a submarine-based deterrent.

"There's precedent for a conventional US drawdown spurring efforts at nuclear proliferation. South Korea interpreted the pullout of a US combat division from the Korean Peninsula in 1971 as a precursor to a withdrawal of the US nuclear guarantee - and launched a crash nuclear-weapons program in response. Similarly, China's nuclear breakout in the 1960s, followed by US force reductions on Taiwan in the 1970s, prompted Chiang Kai-shek to initiate clandestine research into a Taiwanese bomb.

"Washington prevailed on Taipei and Seoul to forego the nuclear option, in part by convincing them it remained committed to their defense and possessed the wherewithal to fulfill its commitment. Now as then, as [United States journalist Walter] Lippmann might counsel, the repercussions could be dire if Asian leaders lose confidence in the US armed forces' staying power in the region."

YOUNG